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SUBJECT: LAKE CHAD BASIN COMMISSION FIGHTS NATURAL RESOURCE LOSS

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) Cheibou Mohamed, Project Director at the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), a regional body in charge of water resource management for one of Africa's most significant environmental challenges, briefed Embassy staff on the organization's history and current activities. Mohamed said that with the help of the international community, LCBC is undertaking projects and programs to improve the current state of Lake Chad, whose surface area has shrunk from 25,000 square Km in 1964 to merely 2,000 Sq Km today, yet whose basin still supports some 30 millions people. As part of the LCBC's effort to save the lake, the Director added, the organization was looking to transfer water from CAR's Oubangui River into Lake Chad. END SUMMARY.

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HISTORY OF LAKE CHAD BASIN  
AND THE COMMISSION  
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¶2. (U) Lake Chad is located at the northwestern corner of Chad, and is bordered by Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon as well as Chad. The lake is fed by the Chari, Logone, and Komadougou rivers. The Lake Chad Basin supports approximately 30 million people whose way of life involves agriculture and nomadic and semi-nomadic husbandry and fisheries.

¶3. (U) Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria joined together and founded the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) on May 24, 1964 to address degradation of the lake. Since the inception of the LCBC, CAR and Libya have also become members. The regional body's goals are to promote rational and sustainable use of the basin's water resources, to coordinate regional development, and to resolve any conflicts regarding resource usage that may arise among member countries. The LCBC relies on member countries' contributions to finance basin projects and to sustain an operating budget. Contributions are assigned based on the size of each country's GDP; thus Nigeria provides 52 percent of the budget, followed by Cameroon with 26 percent, Chad with 11 percent, Niger with 7 percent, and CAR with 4 percent.

¶4. (U) Lake Chad's challenges are extreme. The region has experienced declining annual rainfall over a long period and persistent drought in the 1970s and 1980s, in addition to desertification, and severely reduced inflows into Lake Chad, according to LCBC interlocutors. As a result, the surface area of the lake has shrunk, and associated agriculture, livestock and fisheries are in serious decline. The current surface area of the lake is approximately 2,000 km square, which is less than 10 percent of its historical size.

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PLETHORA OF CURRENT PROJECTS  
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¶5. (U) Cheibou Mohamad, the commission's project director, shared with econoff and econ LES a general description of the current activities of the regional body. Mohamad said that the commission had helped each member country develop a National Action Plan, which in turn formed part of the LCBC's overall Strategic Plan. He said that the commission was currently involved in some 35 projects in the Basin.

¶6. (U) Mohamed indicated that the African Development Bank (ADB) was assisting the LCBC to draft a water charter to define use of water resources among country members. Germany was funding two projects to increase understanding of the Basin's surface and underground water and to identify possible links between the two. Mohamed also noted that the European Union was helping fund a project on management and sustainability of the Basin's surface and underground water.

¶7. (U) According to Mohamed, the ADB was funding half of a Sustainable Program for Development project, whose total cost was 60 million USD, adding that there was also Islamic Bank for Development (IBD) and World Bank (WB) interest in the project. According to Mohamed, the project aimed at protecting the lake and basin by fixing dunes, tackling degradation, preserving resources (including rare species), and establishing a 2 million USD Development Fund for member countries to finance local initiatives. Mohamed also said that the LCBC was in the third year of a six-year project to address HIV prevention and reduction in the basin. The 12 million USD-worth of projects was funded by the ADB, he added.

¶8. (U) Mohamed noted that a September 2007 visit of UNSYG Ban, who called on the international community to rescue Lake Chad, had opened the door to more international partnerships and resources for the commission. He cited the ADB funding of the 30 millions USD-worth Project as a result of Ban's call. Still, concrete international assistance was still slow to arrive, Mohamed conceded.

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BRINGING WATER TO LAKE CHAD  
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¶9. (U) Mohamed described several long-term projects, including the possibility of transferring water from CAR's Oubangui River to Lake Chad. He stated that the commission had hired a team of consultants to undertake a feasibility study, to include addressing the concerns of the three Oubangui Basin countries: Congo, Congo-Brazzaville and CAR. The study would evaluate the possibility of building a hydro-electric dam on the Oubangui, improving year-round navigability of the river, and the possibility of connecting the Oubangui with Chad's Chari River via a 145 km conduit. The Director said that the study would also look at the flow and volume of Chad's two main rivers, the Chari and the Longone, that flow into Lake Chad. If the rivers' conditions were found to be sufficient, water from the Oubangui might not need to be transferred to Lake Chad, Mohamed noted.

¶10. (U) Minimize considered.

SBREMNER